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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [IR](#) [KU](#) [KUWAIT](#) [IRAN](#) [RELATIONS](#)  
SUBJECT: FORMER GCC SECRETARY GENERAL: "NO COMMON GCC  
STRATEGY ON IRAN"

REF: A. KUWAIT 2883  
[1](#)B. KUWAIT 2855  
[1](#)C. KUWAIT 397

Classified By: DCM Matt Tueller for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (C/NF) Summary: Former Secretary General of the Gulf Cooperation Council Ambassador Abdullah Bishara told PolOff September 19 the GCC had "no common strategy on Iran," a problem he attributed largely to friction between Saudi Arabia and Qatar. He believed an effective GCC strategy should support: 1) Iranian cooperation with the IAEA; 2) Iran's compliance with UNSCR 1696; 3) continued Iranian dialogue with the EU-3; and 4) the creation of a Gulf nuclear-weapons free zone. Bishara suggested the U.S. could support the formulation of more cohesive GCC policy by continuing to support European dialogue with Iran, presenting a "serious" Middle East peace plan, and supporting the IAEA. Bishara expressed some concern about the impact of regional developments on Shi'a-Sunni relations in Kuwait, but said that overall relations were "very good" and dismissed the possibility of wide-spread, sectarian-influenced domestic unrest in Kuwait. Bishara said the primary threat to Kuwait from Iraq was continued instability. He claimed the emergence of a largely autonomous Shi'a region in southern Iraq would "not have a major impact on Kuwait." Bishara believed the recent Israel-Hizballah conflict had de-legitimized Hizballah in the eyes of Gulf Arabs due to the damage inflicted on Lebanon as a result of Hizballah's "brinkmanship" and "adventurism." End summary.

Obstacles to and Suggestions for Common GCC Strategy  
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[1](#)2. (C/NF) During a September 19 meeting with PolOff, former GCC Secretary General Ambassador Abdullah Bishara lamented the fact that there was "no common GCC strategy on Iran," a problem he blamed primarily on tensions between Qatar and Saudi Arabia. The Qataris see Saudi Arabia as a greater threat than Iran and routinely provoke the Saudi government by hosting dissident Saudis on Qatar-based Al-Jazeera television programs, he explained. The Saudis respond more subtly through their media outlets and by applying economic pressure on Qatar, Bishara said, citing a recent "Saudi financial paper" that was unfavorable to Qatar. Other Gulf countries are concerned by these tensions, which undermine the cohesiveness of the GCC. Bishara, who is one of Kuwait's five GCC Advisory Committee members, said he was "surprised" by Qatar's vote against UNSCR 1696. Qatar should have voted for the resolution, but qualified its position in the adjoining notes, he argued.

[1](#)3. (C/NF) Explaining other GCC countries' position on Iran, Bishara said Oman supports "dialogue" and "neutrality," and does not see Iran as a major threat. The United Arab

Emirates (UAE) has its own specific bilateral issues with Iran, most notably the long-running islands dispute, which complicate cooperation with the GCC on a common Iran strategy, he noted. Bishara claimed Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and to a lesser extent Bahrain have a "well-defined, coherent approach towards Iran," but stressed that "this is not enough. We need a unified, common GCC policy." Bishara believed this policy should mirror the Saudi-Kuwait-Bahrain approach and: 1) Encourage Iran to cooperate fully with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA); 2) Urge Iran to comply with UNSCR 1696; 3) Encourage continued Iranian dialogue with the EU-3; and 4) Urge the creation of a Gulf nuclear-weapons free zone. Bishara said the GCC "needs to state these positions clearly," but acknowledged that there was no agreement on these four points.

¶4. (C/NF) Bishara argued that some Arab countries' calls for a Middle East-wide nuclear-weapons free zone were a distraction and played into Iran's hands by reducing pressure on the GOI to halt its own nuclear program. He noted, however, that Kuwait's FM Dr. Mohammed Al-Sabah had also recently called for a Middle East nuclear-weapons free zone in his speech at the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) conference in Cuba, though he downplayed this as mere rhetoric.

¶5. (C/NF) The U.S. can help promote a common GCC strategy on Iran by "presenting a serious Middle East peace plan" and "continuing to work with the Europeans," Bishara argued. He believed "the Europeans will ultimately admit that their approach (to Iran) is futile," but he said it was nonetheless important to present a united international front on Iran. He particularly stressed the need for the U.S. and EU-3 to agree on common policy, noting that French President Jacques Chirac's recent comments suggested divisions among the allies

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on Iran. Bishara also urged the U.S. to support the IAEA, whose reports he said provided valuable legitimacy for criticisms of Iran's nuclear program and were seen as more objective than U.S. allegations of Iranian nuclear intentions and capabilities. Ultimately, solving the Israel-Palestinian issue and stabilizing Iraq will open a "corridor of stability" in the region, Bishara concluded.

Kuwaiti Shi'a-Sunni Relations Good, But Irritants Exist

¶6. (C/NF) Speaking about the recent pro-Hizballah rallies in Kuwait (refs A and B), Bishara said, "I have never in all my life seen such public displays of sectarianism in Kuwait." He added that he "worried" about the "intensity of activities in Kuwaiti husseiniyas (religiously-oriented Shi'a diwaniyas)" after the recent Israel-Hizballah conflict, but noted that there were "significant differences" among Kuwaiti Shi'a on this issue. According to Bishara, Kuwaitis are "very concerned" about the impact of sectarian violence in Iraq, tensions with Iran, and the Israel-Hizballah conflict on sectarian relations in Kuwait. Although he characterized overall Shi'a-Sunni relations in Kuwait as "very good," Bishara warned that these three issues, which Shi'a and Sunnis tend to view differently, were an "irritant" to relations between the two communities. He noted, though, that on some issues such as U.S. policies, Hizballah and Hamas, and Iran's nuclear program, hard-line Sunni Islamists and pro-Iran Shi'a shared some common positions.

¶7. (C/NF) Bishara dismissed rumors of Iranian-backed Shi'a sleeper cells in Kuwait, arguing that "there are 'sympathizers,' but no 'cells' or 'proxies.'" He claimed that although there was a "small, but vocal minority" of Shi'a in Kuwait who "sympathized" with Iran and supported its policies in articles and speeches, the majority of Kuwaiti Shi'a did not/not support Iran or Hizballah.

Threat from Iraq: Instability, not Federalism

18. (C/NF) Bishara said the primary threat from Iraq was continued instability, not the emergence of a largely, autonomous Shi'a region in southern Iraq. "Federalism in Iraq will not have a major impact on Kuwait," he claimed. If sectarian violence continues or increases, Bishara warned, Shi'a-Sunni relations in Kuwait could be negatively affected. He was particularly concerned about sectarian death squads, though he did not explain how he thought these groups would impact Shi'a-Sunni relations in Kuwait. Bishara reported that the Saudis had "good relations" with Sunni tribal shaykhs in Iraq and tried to play a mediating role between them and other groups. Bishara claimed "most Sunni leaders in Iraq," whom he described as "not credible," were "worried about their future."

#### Concerns about Regional Developments

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19. (C/NF) According to Bishara, Egypt, Jordan, and the GCC are fighting against "Iran, Hizballah, Sunni extremists, Shi'a sympathizers, Hamas, and Syria" to implement a "moderate, peaceful vision for the Middle East." Although Bishara said he believed "we (the moderates) are winning," he admitted that "we fear Iran's designs on the region" and its nuclear ambitions. "Iran has the ability to wreak havoc in Iraq and to destabilize the Gulf," Bishara warned. Reiterating a previous point, Bishara stressed that "we can resist Iran through a strong Egypt-Jordan-GCC alliance and by finding a just solution to the Israel Palestinian issue, because this is being used by Hizballah, Iran, and other extremists (to justify their actions)." On Lebanon, Bishara was somewhat more optimistic, saying he believed the recent Israel-Hizballah conflict had "de-legitimized" Hizballah in the eyes of Gulf Arabs due to the damage inflicted on Lebanon as a result of Hizballah's "adventurism" and "brinkmanship."

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